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Brand Failure in Pakistan: Content Analytic Findings

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the reasons behind the failure of certain brands in Pakistan and to classify them into seven reasons as given in the literature. Brands often fail to recognize their own power, dilute their brand equity by over extensions, ape the competing products, become overly optimistic in catering to the market single handedly, try to deceive customers by focusing more on advertising while compromising on quality and forget to keep pace with rapid innovations and technology. Such brands defy the concept of branding which is to facilitate pre-sell by building strong associations.

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1. Introduction

It is ironical that Pakistan has a number of successful brands but less has been written about the roaring success of these titan brands. The study of brand fiascos is equally interesting but systematic study on brand failures is absolutely absent. This study attempts to replicate the Matt Haig's classic work on brand failures in local scenario. It starts with a review of Matt Haig's work; links the basic failure classification with local examples and at the end draws conclusions. The scope of this paper is limited to brands that have failed over the last two decades; some were initiatives from mature established brands with poor executions while others were planned to fail.

2. Literature Review

Matt Haig wrote the most prolific book of branding history titled as "Brand Failures: The Truth about the 100 Biggest Branding Mistakes of All Time" (Haig, 2004). In his book he has classified the brand failures as: (a) **Brand Amnesia** is when a brand tries to assume a new garb altogether to bring about a fundamental change in its brand identity. This radical swing confuses the customer thus challenging loyalty. The classic example for this mistake is the New Coke. (b) **Brand Ego** is the erroneous estimation of a brand's capability to deal with the whole market single handedly as Polaroid in the instant photography market, or to go into radical unrelated diversification as Harley Davidson did when it tried to sell perfumes. (c) **Brand Megalomania** is when a brand having a voracious appetite for new ventures goes into excessive brand extensions, trying to enter into every product category possible. Virgin, for example, sells cars, credit cards, pension funds, cola, cosmetics, records etc. This over stretching sometimes leads to brand dilution which very few brands escape. (d) **Brand Deception** is a deadly sin some brands commit when they compromise on quality hoping to cover it up through enticing marketing tactics. (e) **Brand Fatigue** sets in when brands turn stale having been on the shelves for too long and as a result creativity and sales sag. (f) **Brand Paranoia** is the deadly sin committed by insecure brands when they resort to lawsuits, reinventions and imitations in the face of increasing competition. (g) **Brand Irrelevance** sets in when a brand is rendered obsolete in the face rapidly changing technology, market shifts, needs and preferences.

Praise for this work has come from different quarters; some of them termed it as a goldmine (Ries, 2004); some said the lessons are deadly serious (Barwise, 2004); some cited as it brings together the business lessons from all the infamous brand disasters (Doyle, 2004);

some saw it as a treasure trove of information and insights (Gelder, 2004); some attributed failures towards misunderstanding or misapplication of brand strategy (Baker, 2004); someone highlighted the history of consumer marketing littered with failed brands (Smith, 2004), while some termed it „a good brand autopsy’ (Mardoll, 2011). Even the strongest media was also full of praise for Matt Haig’s work; as published as “Illuminating and amusing.” by The Business (2004); as entertaining and useful” by Financial Times (2004); as “lively, engaging” by Marketing Business (2004); “[someone must] be able to spot a potential brand disaster”, Internet Works (2004).

Criticism was also found in abundance; for example (a) some of the leading critics termed them outdated (Blair, 2012) (b) English language across the Atlantics was also criticized (Elise, 2013) (c) Some feel Haig „contradicts himself many times’ (Veeral, 2012). Most interestingly, the book cites giants like McDonald’s, Coke, Virgin etc. most other examples are either purely British or are relatively lesser known to us in Asia. Such fascinating and fabulous concepts could be understood better if the degree of relatedness was increased. A research gap was identified and an idea originated to apply the concept of these sins as reasons for brand failure to the failures in the Pakistani market for better understanding and analysis.

3. Methodology

The methodology adopted for this qualitative research paper was content analysis. Content analysis or textual analysis is “Any technique of making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969). It was Harold Lasswell (1948) who formulated the core questions of content analysis – “Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?” In essence, the most succinct description of content analysis may be, “Content analysis is a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on scientific method (including attention to objectivity, inter subjectivity, priori design, reliability and hypothesis testing) and is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented” (Neuendorf, 2002). Content Analysis has been employed in this study as it is commonly used technique in branding studies (Ishtiaq, & Siddiqui, 2016) and it provides opportunity to collect verbal, print and electronic data by both ways qualitatively and quantitatively (Mburu, Matenge, Amanze, Makgosa, 2013).

The study under review has many distinctions over earlier local branding studies. Some of the earlier studies have touched the issue but with a narrow focus such as on intergenerational influences on brand preferences (Siddiqui, Bashir, Sarki, Jaffari & Abbas, 2012; Hussain & Siddiqui, 2015); some of earlier studies were focused on a particular segment like Islamic branding (Jumani & Siddiqui, 2012); branded clothing (Khakhan & Siddiqui, 2015); fertilizer branding (Siddiqui, Ahmad, Manan & Choudhary, 2013); telecom branding (Siddiqui, Ali, Sarki, Khuhro, 2015); and country branding (Siddiqui & Sibghatullah, 2014). The study under-review provides in-depth rich examples of brand failure from local market inclusive of all industry segments. Most recently two classical studies have significantly explained the brand failure in Pakistan. These studies have summarize the brand failures in Pakistan from three different dimensions (a) indicators for brand failure, (b) reasons of brand failure and (c) tactics to save brands from permanent failure (Saeed. & Siddiqui, 2015; Saeed & Siddiqui, 2016). Both studies are quantitative and lack the rich qualitative data from local market.

4. Findings

This study supports and augments the Haig's brand failure classification in local perspective. All seven classes of brand failure are represented here with the help of small case studies of local brands.

4.1 Brand Amnesia

Haleeb Foods Ltd. initiated business in 1984 under the name of Chaudhry Dairies Ltd. and launched its first product Haleeb in 1986. From being the pioneer of dairy industry in Pakistan to being the market leader of Ultra High Treatment (UHT) milk, Haleeb's market share of 52 percent in 2006-7 went down to 10 percent at present. Haleeb was once a challenger to Milkpak but ceded to the pressure of aggressive marketing from Nestle, followed by Olper's from Engro Foods (Haq, 2013). The brand had a strong USP in thick, creamy, rich milk but drifted away from its positioning of '*sub se garha doodh Haleeb*' to '*Chaye banaye khoob Haleeb, sub se garha doodh Haleeb*' (Haleeb makes the best tea as it is the thickest/richest milk). Nestlé's Milkpak on the other hand, retained its positioning. The fact that Haleeb has recently launched its new brand GroAur in the drinking liquid milk segment (Mehar, 2013) endorses the earlier drift and Haleeb's current effort to revitalize the brand.

4.2 Brand Ego

CDL faltered once again as it tried to extend into plastic bottled milk with Candia in 1999. It was a French brand being processed and packaged under license by CDL as plastic bottled milk, a category that had no competitor. However, despite this first mover advantage, the brand failed. Instead of capitalizing on its packaging, the brand was positioned on its distinct pink color and unique taste which did not appeal to the consumers. The brand suffered from brand ego with this extension as it attempted to deal with tetra pak as well as plastic bottled milk categories too soon simultaneously.

Haleeb Foods tried to extend further into tetra fino packaging with Haleeb Dairy Queen Milk. Tetra fino pack is a low cost pillow shaped carton and the newly launched Dairy Queen was unsuccessful due to its poor quality labeling, packaging and design which created a perception of a low quality brand (Misbah, 2012). In essence, Haleeb which had a strong USP in its thickest milk and top of the mind recall with that awareness lost its competitive advantage as it tried to introduce extensions in the drinking milk category to counter multinational competition, but its integrated marketing communication efforts failed to deliver the focus to tea and drinking segments.

The beverage industry saw egotistical disasters with Pepsi Max and Pepsi Twist. In the case of Pepsi Max, the positioning was unclear. It was a low calorie, sugar free Pepsi with a cola taste in a completely new packaging introduced as an alternative to Diet Pepsi. It was launched in Pakistan in 2008 and again re-launched unsuccessfully in 2009 (Rahman, 2009). It failed in several other countries including India and Pakistan as it was marketed as a substitute to Pepsi while Diet Pepsi was already available in the market (Bhattacharya et al, 2011). Pepsi Twist, in a lemon flavor, was also marketed in Pakistan in 2006. The product failed to capture the market due largely to its poor advertising and taste (Haseeb, 2010). When established mature brands tread unsafe waters with extensions that are not well thought out they tend to drift away from the core identity of the product which does nothing but distort the brand's perception.

In the telecom sector, some heavy weights like Blackberry have also gaffed in some cases with egotism. The Blackberry Storm 9500 with its touch screen tried to create a new identity, diluting the original, to which the customers could not relate. Among other problems the phone was not user friendly and had no Wifi (Bites 2009).

The highly hyped Zong's M9 Package was launched as a bunch of packages with low calling, SMS and GPRS rates to select from. M9 was a package with a feel of a customized plan (Andrew, 2011). Zong pioneered the concept of being able to design your own mobile usage plan by logging on to the website. Even though the target market for M9 was tech savvy the website was complicated and offered too many permutations of solutions to an audience already bamboozled with varying call, SMS and GPRS rates. The brand's ego was challenged when the new website choked on record high hits (Ameen, 2011) when the website received more than 275,000 hits and more than 30,000 people booked their numbers in advance. The company could not cater to the market and subsequently lost its first mover advantage.

Unilever, an established company with a diverse portfolio of well-known products and several brands enjoying market leadership position, went too far out with its Pond's range. A best-selling range of skin care products does not blend in well with the dental category. Pond's Toothpaste as a brand extension was unsuccessful because the product failed the blind taste. There was a complete mismatch between the taste and the characteristic fragrance of Pond's range (brandfailures, 2007). The consumers could not differentiate the taste from that of any other toothpaste. They associated the fragrance to products that were meant for external application only. Unilever had clearly over-diversified into an unrelated category.

Unilever surprisingly faltered again this time with its Fair and Lovely range when it tried to extend the fairness attribute to talcs in Pakistan and India. Consumers associate fairness with creams and lotions that get absorbed into the skin unlike talcum powder. The brand failed to translate this feature physically. This extension was an egotistical move on the part of Unilever (Financial Express, 2002).

4.3 Brand Megalomania

The Dawn Newspaper, a highly venerable and authentic English daily, enjoys a strong brand heritage and having a huge portfolio as it has filled the line with its evening daily Star, Herald magazine, IT magazine Spider, marketing and advertising magazine Aurora and City FM89 an English radio channel. The Dawn Media group with its successive aspiration extensions did not realize that the launch of a radio channel was in essence a diversification rather an extension as the rest. In line with the continuing trend DawnNews, the TV channel, was launched ambitiously. It was perfectly in sync with the Immutable Laws of Branding. It made good use of an already established brand name and augmented the brand essence of the newspaper. Instead of trying to be all things to all people, it kept its focus narrow by staying

true to its initial positioning (S.K., 2010). DawnNews was targeting foreign channels like BBC, CNN and Fox News. They failed to realize that majority of the viewers were bilingual and the channel therefore failed to lure advertisements. As confirmed by the Head Dawn Media Group, with the serious decline in revenues and the subsequently poor channel ratings that ensued (Saigol, 2010), DawnNews had to reposition itself into a hybrid Urdu-English Channel (Siddiqui & Fahim, 2014).

HobNob Café is a revamped version of Copper Kettle. The restaurant was a trendsetter in Karachi. A host of other coffee shops and restaurants followed suit. The roaring success of Copper Kettle was followed by extending into Hob Nob Bakeries and finally into the organic food segment with Neco's that is not only an organic restaurant / café but also features and organic food store boasting a whole host of organic products. Neco's also offers home delivery of its organic Safe Milk. Recently, Copper Kettle has been revamped into the Hob Nob Café at Zamzama (Adil, 2013). The parent brand has shown tremendous market sensitivity identifying growing segment and ferreting out gaps and niches in the market to be filled. The revamping is intended to cash in on the brand equity of the Hob Nob chain.

4.4 Brand Deception

Binaca toothpaste was a product of Ciba Geigy. The catchy jingle we still remember from the 70s and 80s and the spillover effect of advertising via Binaca Geetmala from Radio Ceylon - a popular radio programs in those years. It had been sponsored by Reckitt Benckiser and later sold to Dabur India. As a product, Binaca was less superior to its rivals Pepsodent, Crest, Macleans and Forhan's (Shah, 2011). Due to the radio program, Binaca as a brand was popular among Pakistani consumers even before the brand hit the local market. The brand found early acceptance at a time when the market had only a few toothpastes and mostly dental powders. As the brand did not have a unique offering or a clear promise, it could compete against the superior rival brands (Ehsen, 2011). The deception was not intentional, but the brand tried to rely on its advertising rather than making an effort to improve quality.

Kia Spectra failed as an affordable small car as it was low on safety and reliability and had an unexciting design element. The repair and maintenance cost of all Kia cars was high in Pakistan (Rankings and reviews, 2012). Vendors like Kia, Hyundai, Nissan and Adams (a Pakistani brand) suffered heavy losses on the tooling of their parts as most equipment manufacturers chose to diversify into other more profitable segments. The 2010 Spectra re-launched by Kia has undergone a dramatic redesign (Motortrend, 2008). Kia Pride likewise

had technical issues like engine and suspension faults, interior problems and bodywork issues (Fault Guide, 2002). The Kia Sportage similarly had technical and structural issues (Wikipedia/ Kia Sportage). The stretched longer version was for Asian markets and also failed. All Kia cars were assembled *under license* by Dewan Motors and were *deceptive and compromised on quality*.

Adams Motor Company was a Karachi based Pakistani automotive assembler that was the first to produce a locally assembled car Revo fitted with a Chinese engine and transmission (Wikipedia, 2009). The car had a cheap plastic interior and disagreeable looks. The ambitious plans of exporting the car fizzled as Revo failed to capture even the local market as it was „a far cry from the luxury vehicles’ (Hasan, 2012). It was a clear case of deception and the brand may have survived as it was 10 to 15 percent cheaper than other local competitors, namely Mehran 800cc which dominates the Pakistani market (Hasan, 2012).

Suzuki is associated with producing low cost, economically affordable, compact cars for the masses. The company discontinued Baleno when it launched Liana in 2006. The car did not have any unique selling proposition. It had an unimpressive ride and the market could relate to it as a luxury car. Liana lost 20-25% sales. (Hussain, 2006). The luxury segment is clearly dominated by Toyota and Honda. Plus, Suzuki only actively promoted its CNG version rather than the petrol one. Liana’s performance was not at par with the other 1300cc cars, it faced some technical and maintenance issues, was less spacious, did not have an attractive design and the body was not durable enough to sustain the challenging roads of Pakistan (pakwheels, 2008). The customers felt deceived into the bargain as the car did not even have much resale value.

4.5 Brand Fatigue

Tibet Snow is another brand that has come of age. This fairness cream, targeted at the females of the lower middle income segment, was positioned as an affordable cream. Introduced by Kohinoor Chemicals in 1930s, the brand has now turned stale with virtually no mass advertising, no significant shelf presence and has a low and silent turnover (Sohail, 2012). Tibet Snow is an example of a tired brand that was never revitalized. A change in packaging and a new aggressive advertising campaign or repositioning could have significantly re-energized the brand. No effort was made to remove the negative perception that developed over time that the beauty cream had dangerously high levels of mercury. The

brand has also become irrelevant as women turn increasingly more to parlors for their beauty treatments.

GSK launched its famous and successful global brand Horlicks in Pakistan with a genuine malt flavour. The brand itself was not well received by the masses in Pakistan due to its malt based flavor. GSK did not conduct any pre-launch research, post launch study or marketing at the time of launch which resulted in lower sales and consumer response than expected. The product was repositioned to new market segment and proved to be a success story (Latif, Sibghatullah & Siddiqui, 2016).

4.6 Brand Paranoia

Royal Crown Cola (RC Cola) was a cola flavored soft drink dates back to 1905 in the US launched by an established group Dr. Pepper Snapple Group. It was popular in Pakistan in 70s and 80s. The beverage came under tremendous competitive pressure from Coke and Pepsi in the 90s and also faced several international lawsuits. Consequently, the company withdrew its investments from Pakistan. (Ali et al). The company did not focus on its promotional campaign when Pepsi and Coke stormed into the market and bombarded the industry with heavy advertising. They did not change the shape and size of the bottle either. RC Cola ruled the roost when there were no other colas in the market but with the onslaught of competition and lawsuits the company became paranoid and was flushed out of the market.

Anyone who spent their teens or childhood in Karachi in the 90s, must still remember the magic of Mr. Burger. Even though Hanifia and Chips were contenders they were no match. All burger loyalists flocked Mr. Burger until international franchises like McDonald's and KFC opened their outlets and charmed the market with their international appeal, especially the children's market. Mr. Burger tried to add to the menu with donuts, brownies, hot dogs and rolls and renovated its outlets several times it could not prevent its grip slipping away on the market. The brand, unlike Chips, made the mistake of getting paranoid enough to increase its prices exorbitantly in an attempt to match the brand image of McDonald's (Shaikh, 2012). This move backfired and cost the brand its loyal customers.

4.7 Brand Irrelevance

Tetley Pakistan was a joint venture between Lakson Group and Tata Tea India. Tetley is a UK based tea brand, part of Tetley Clover in Pakistan since 2004. The company launched a campaign after a hiatus of almost 18 months, introducing the „new’ Tetley Gold. The new campaign is unique in its desperate measure of offering a money back guarantee option in case of dissatisfaction. Tetley has three brands in Pakistan: Tetley Strong, Tetley Josh and Tetley Gold, launched in 2010 (Andrew, 2011). The company had a market share of 8 percent in 2011 which declined to 4 percent. Tetley in Pakistan has failed to do well despite its established presence in UK since 1837. The cultural phenomena cannot be ignored. Tea industry in Pakistan has two key segments, urban and rural and the product has traditional links. The company succumbed to the two leading giants, Unilever and Tapal. The urban segment will adapt to the changing dynamics of tea consumption but the rural segment will continue to retain its preferences. *The Pakistani market could not relate to orange or strawberry flavored hot beverage, unlike UK where tea does enjoy a preference over coffee.* Tetley internationally has a trendy positioning targeting the younger segment that is lively and upbeat. The brand did not try to relate to the local consumer till as of late. It failed to keep its execution and ideas local (Moeen, 2011). Hence the brand had been irrelevant to the needs and preferences of the local consumers here.

RIN, a product of Unilever, had primarily been introduced as a laundry detergent bar in Pakistan in April 1984. The product was specially formulated and promoted as a fabric washer but was in fact being used for dishwashing. It was the only non-soap detergent (NSD) bar in the market (Suvashish, 2011). RIN was a blue NSD bar and only 15% of the consumers were using it solely for fabric washing, the remaining 65% were using it for dishwashing because of its blue color. The users associated blue color with dishwashing based on their past experience. Unilever failed in its successive attempts and ultimately repositioned RIN as a dishwashing bar in view of customers’ preferences (Kotler, 2010). In 2008, RIN was launched as a detergent in powder form like Surf and Sunlight, offering whiteness and fragrance. This was a classic example of brand irrelevance where the company had to bow down to the wishes of customer preferences.

Instaphone’s CDMA phone had to step down to the more popular and growing GSM technology which is now available to 95% population of the country (pta.gov.pk, 2013). CDMA stands for Code Division Multiple Access and was popular as it transferred voice and data separately using m codes thus creating more space for data transfer and hence was

preferred for the 3G generation. However, the roaming readiness and fraud prevention are the two major advantages that have made Global System Mobile the global leader in cellular technology with 73% of the worldwide market (Carneiro, 2005). Instaphone's cellular license was suspended in 2011. The company did not adopt the technology adopted by its rivals Ufone, Mobilink, Warid and China Mobile. The monopoly of GSM players posed as an obstacle for Instaphone, the only mainstream CDMA provider in Pakistan (propakistani, 2012).

The Pakistan Telecommunication Co. Ltd. (PTCL) launched its state of the art technology Integrated Service Digital Network (ISDN) in all the major cities of the country, featuring faster, clear voice, fax communication, video images, video conferencing, high speed data transfer, graphics etc. and all with one conventional line installed (pakistanpressfoundation, 2003). The company did not realize that the analog line of ISDN is dependent on the AC power and a power outage disrupts the internet connection as well as voice connection. This was a criticism on ISDN worldwide even as far back as 1999 (Guterman, 1999). Given the power crisis in the country, the technology was not applicable here in Pakistan. PTCL rectified the failure quickly with its broadband DSL service that provides uninterrupted internet access and ease of creating a LAN network.

Sabun 707, a translucent laundry soap bar, fizzled out with the emergence of detergent powders. Laundry soap bars were meant for hand wash only. The technological shift towards machine wash and the changing lifestyle with housewives doing their own laundry instead of maids led to the phasing out of the brand. There was no clear brand promise associated with the brand and the power of advertising was lost as the brand became irrelevant (Ehsen, 2011)

5. Conclusion

All the failed or repositioned brands discussed fall into one of the categories of sins identified and cited earlier. Most of these brands have i) overestimated their potential ii) tried to have a finger in every pie iii) not responded to changing shifts in markets and technology iv) relied on marketing gimmicks rather than focusing on quality, reengineering or repositioning v) became obsessed with and unnecessarily fearful of competition vi) lost the zest to pump energy into a dying brand and vii) lost focus on their core business diluting the brand equity.

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